



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An acute or chronic disorder of the skin around the vulva (the vaginal lips) and anus. This disorder is characterized by severe itching. It is not contagious. It affects female adolescents and adults, especially after menopause.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Intense itching, sensitivity and irritation in the genital area. The skin may be dry.
- Thin, white vaginal discharge (sometimes).
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse.

CAUSES

- Skin disease, such as psoriasis or lichen planus.
- Systemic disease, such as diabetes.
- Atrophy and dryness caused by estrogen deficiency.
- Skin reaction to irritants, such as toilet tissue, sanitary pads, soap, douches, deodorants, powders, perfume and fabric.
- Systemic allergies, including food allergies.
- Disorder of the vagina or rectum, such as vaginitis or hemorrhoids.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress.
- Days prior to menstruation.
- Hot, humid weather.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Lack of urinary control.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear cotton underpants rather than nylon.
- Avoid contact with irritants listed in Causes.
- Obtain medical treatment for underlying disorders.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Treatment usually provides relief in 1-2 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Secondary bacterial infection of the inflamed skin.
- Chronic course.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory study of vaginal secretions, and, if needed, a biopsy of the vulva (removal of a small amount of tissue for laboratory examination).
- Treatment of any underlying cause.
- Wear cotton underclothes.
- Keep the area as dry and cool as possible. Wear loose clothing.
- Don't scratch the itchy area. Scratching will aggravate soreness and irritation.
- Wash the genital area with water and unscented soap only once a day.
- Use a lubricant, such as K-Y Lubricating Jelly or baby oil, during intercourse.
- After urinating or having a bowel movement, clean the genital area gently with absorbent cotton or antiseptic wipes. Wipe from front to back (vagina to anus).
- During menstruation, use tampons rather than sanitary napkins until the disorder heals.
- Sit in bathtub of warm (tepid, not hot) water several times a day to help relieve itching.

MEDICATIONS

- Treatment for any infectious cause found.
- Use low-potency, non-prescription steroid creams or ointments.
- More potent steroid creams or lotions to reduce inflammation may be prescribed. These require 24 to 36 hours to provide relief.
- Ointments that contain hormones are sometimes recommended.
- Benzodiazepines or antihistamines at night to ensure rest.

ACTIVITY

Avoid overexertion, heat and excessive sweating.

DIET

No special diet, except to avoid foods to which you may be allergic. Avoid coffee or other caffeine beverages. Also avoid tomatoes and peanuts.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of pruritus vulvae.
- Symptoms don't improve in 2 weeks, despite treatment.
- Scratching leads to skin infection.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.